

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION CONFERENCE  
10-13 JUNE 2022, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

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## Schedule

Time	Friday 10 June	Saturday 11 June	Sunday 12 June
9h00-11h00		Social Theory and Religion  Subjectivity and Religion  Critical Religion	The End of Religion – Feminist Reappraisals of the State (panel)  Unveiling Critique, or What Do We Do with Christianity?  Biblical Criticism and Criticism of Sacred Texts
11h00-11h30		Coffee break	Coffee break
11h30-13h00		Religion and Northern Ireland (2)  Critical Methodology on Religion  Literary and Film Criticism	Religion and Politics  Religion and the Digital  Gender (1): Religions and androcentrism
13h00-14h00		Lunch break	Lunch break
14h-16h00		Critical Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis  Religion and the Environment	Religion, Politics, Freedom of religion, Violence  Gender (2): Women experiences and narrative
16h00	Welcome & Plenary:	Coffee break	Coffee break
16h30-18h00	Religion, Politics and Northern Ireland	'Critical Religion' beyond Religious Studies: Towards Critical Study of Modernity (panel)  Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Race  Secularism, the Post-secular, and Secularization	Religion and Social Justice (panel)  Gender (3) Gender, Religion, and Intimate Life  Religion, Science, and Modernity
18h00-19h	Reception		Closing Discussion
19h00			End of conference Dinner (Great Hall)

**13 June: Belfast Political Tour. Start at 10am, meeting point at the Divis Tower**

## Practical Information

The conference will take place on the main site of Queen's university. Three rooms will be used, all located in the quad of the Lanyon Building:

- The Canada Room and Council Chamber (1 on map below);
- Rooms 2/017 and 2/018 in the Peter Frogatt Centre (PFC; 2 on map)

Receptions and Coffee breaks will in the Canada Room and Council Chamber.

The dinner will take place in the great hall (1a on map), which is also located in the Lanyon Building.

There is a wide range of options for lunch, in particular on Botanic Avenue (top right on map). On the opposite side, along university road, check Maggy May's, Dean's at Queen's, cafés on Stranmillis avenue and within the Ulster Museum. Check opening time on Sunday.

Finally, Belfast has an amazing range of restaurants, around campus and in the city centre. The nightlife is equally vibrant, with many traditional pubs often having music sessions. For more info, click [here](#).



Friday 10 June, 16h00-18h00

**Welcome. Plenary 1: Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Gladys Ganiel (Sociology, Queen's University Belfast)

Email: [g.ganiel@qub.ac.uk](mailto:g.ganiel@qub.ac.uk)

**Northern Ireland's Political crossroads**

Jamie Pow (Politics, Queen's University Belfast)

Email: [j.pow@qub.ac.uk](mailto:j.pow@qub.ac.uk)

**Community Relations and Sectarianism in Northern Ireland**

Cathal McManus (Education, Queen's University Belfast)

Email: [c.p.mcmanus@qub.ac.uk](mailto:c.p.mcmanus@qub.ac.uk)

**Writing the Sociology of Religion in Northern Ireland. Epistemological challenges.**

Véronique Altglas (Sociology, Queen's University Belfast)

Email: [v.altglas@qub.ac.uk](mailto:v.altglas@qub.ac.uk)

**Reception at 18h00 (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Sponsored by Brill Academic Publishers

Saturday 11 June, 09h00-11h00

## Social Theory and Religion (Canada Room & Council Chamber)

Session Chair: Adam Possamai (Western Sydney University, Australia)

### The Ideology of Religious Literacy

Titus Hjelm (Study of religion, University of Helsinki)

Email: [titus.hjelm@helsinki.fi](mailto:titus.hjelm@helsinki.fi)

#### Abstract

Interest in religious literacy has grown exponentially in recent years. Increasing cultural and religious diversity has prompted claims that people in secularised societies are incapable of encountering religious difference. As Dinham and Shaw (2017, 1) put it: “As religion and belief come under renewed scrutiny now, under pressure from extremism, migration and globalisation, we find that the ability to talk well about religion and belief has largely been lost”. Offered as a solution, religious literacy is defined as the ability to understand the history, central beliefs, and practices of different religions and their embedment in social, cultural and political contexts. Importantly, in addition to cognitive internalisation of information, religious literacy aims at attitudinal and emotional effects to enable respectful relationships in a religiously plural context. In this presentation, I argue that the discussion on religious literacy so far has been mainly ideological in character. It is ideological because it has been mostly prescriptive rather than descriptive. From this perspective, secularity is a social problem. Furthermore, the literature assumes rather than demonstrates these cognitive and attitudinal effects. We simply do not know whether religious literacy works cognitively nor that I will have an effect on attitudes. In other words, ‘religious literacy’ is quite literally running on faith – or ideology. I will finish by discussing the forthcoming *Religious Literacy in Action* (RELIACT) project, which aims to fill the empirical gaps in the literature.

### Limits of Theory

Paul Gifford (SOAS, United Kingdom)

Email: [pg@soas.ac.uk](mailto:pg@soas.ac.uk)

#### Abstract

Peter Berger (1929-2017) and David Martin (1929-2017) were two of the most distinguished sociologists of religion of recent decades. This paper will show that their enormously influential output (especially in understanding Christianity of the global south) was significantly flawed because their theoretical speculations lacked sufficient grounding in reality. Berger, depending largely on Weber, understood contemporary Pentecostalism as an agent of modernity, of entrepreneurship and capitalism. Martin, dependent more on Halévy, similarly saw contemporary Pentecostalism as ‘a collective raft pointing with determination towards modernity’, in areas as diverse as gender, law, voluntarism, participation, mobility, authority, peaceability and work discipline. Neither paid sufficient attention to the gospel of prosperity or the ‘enchanted imagination’ underpinning so much third-world Pentecostalism. These pervasive elements, unearthed only by field-work on the ground, limit considerably Pentecostalism’s role as an agent of modernity.



## Profanity in Language: A Foucauldian Explanation of the Islamic Power Relations

Mohammad Hossein Nouri (Independent Researcher) ([video](#))  
Email: [mhnouri3@gmail.com](mailto:mhnouri3@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This piece examines blasphemy determining the relations of sociopolitical actors such as jurists towards blasphemers who can defame the Islamic sources of identity. Within the Foucauldian relations of power, it contends that blasphemy as a field of political activities has been developed in language interrelated with power and resistance along with modern Islamic political discourses. As free subjects, blasphemers have disputed the constructed truth on God, the Prophet, and the sacred when participating in power relations. Then, struggle amongst the subjects such as jurists and blasphemers demonstrates the conflict between two antagonistic wills related to power and resistance. The power relations in language developing blasphemy constructs these subjects. Whereas serving power, the language with its normative forces thus defines blasphemy in Islamic intellectual history.

## Novel Concept-Formation in the Shariatian Social Theory

Seyed Javad Miri (Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Iran)  
Email: [seyedjavad@hotmail.com](mailto:seyedjavad@hotmail.com)

### Abstract

In the *Collected Work* of Shariati, there is a volume entitled as *Ensan* (Human Being) where in the fourth chapter Ali Shariati elaborates on *Free Man* and the *Freedom of Man*. This discussion is related to Shariati's reflections on *History of Religions* which were published in two volumes of 14 and 15 where he discusses the *epistemological dimensions* of the religions of China, India, Iran and the ancient world up to the very birth of Islam. However, the volume 24 is dedicated to *human being* or *Ensan* (as it is conceptualized in Persian) and Shariati is concerned about the *condition of humanity* in contemporary context but in order to fathom the complexities of *contemporary conditions of humanity* he takes into considerations the relation between *humanity* and *history* both in mythological and philosophical forms. At any rate, this book is not significant for me in what it purports to carry on but I am interested in this discourse from a conceptual point of reference. In the chapter on *Free Man* there is a footnote in page 259 where Shariati talks about a *new type of emerging social orders* that he does not dwell upon long enough but it seems here we are faced with an issue worth working on as far as concept-formation is concerned. In other words, if we agree that Ali Shariati is a *classical sociologist* and a *critical social theorist a la* Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm, and Marcuse outside the pantheon of classics of Eurocentric social sciences then we should ask about concepts which he contributed to the discipline of sociology. Did he, at all, have any contribution to the discipline of sociology (and critical social theory)? If the answer is affirmative then we should be able to demonstrate this in concrete terms by introducing his novel concepts as well as conceptual frameworks. Some argue that Shariati is not a sociologist or social theorist but a *religious orator* who successfully incited the Iranian youth and turned them against the *Shah* and paved the way for the revolution of 1979. Following this narrative, it is argued that Shariati was not a sociologist but a demagogical ideologue who earned the epithet of *the Teacher of the Revolution* up to the first decade of post-revolutionary era in the Islamic Republic of Iran. But this narrative seems to be of a *reconstructive nature* which is premised upon a *linear narrative of history* without any critical reference to the *textual legacy* of Ali Shariati. Here we are more interested in the concept-formation in relation to Shariati's social theory.

## **Desiring-Machines and Epektasis: Salvation, Politics, and the Ascesis of Desire**

D. Brendan Johnson (University of Minnesota, USA)  
e-mail: [joh09264@umn.edu](mailto:joh09264@umn.edu)

### **Abstract**

In the Christian West there has been renewed interest in the Orthodox soteriological concepts of *theosis* (divinization) and *epektasis*. This reframes the ethical and spiritual life as a processual and *eros*-centric notion of the soul “stretched out in longing” towards God and infinite based on Pauline language describing our passage “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). Contemporary theologian Sarah Coakley has noted how *epektasis* effects an ascetical intensification of desire for the Trinitarian divine which overflows into generative and just social relations. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari’s landmark works *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* affirm a liberating Marxian-Freudian positive synthesis of ‘desiring-production’ over and against a negative Lacanian notion of desire as lack. This paper reads Deleuze and Guattari alongside Nyssen and his contemporary reception to explore the resonances between their notions of desire; its ascesis and productivity; and their corresponding personal, sexual, social, mystical, and political project(s).

## **Subjectivity and Religion (PFC 02/017)**

Session Chair: Gustavo Morello SJ (Boston College, USA)  
Email: [morellog@bc.edu](mailto:morellog@bc.edu)

## **Rituals, illocutions, and power: Understanding forgiveness in the shadow of religion**

Nick Mauro and Jordan Kiper (University of Alabama, Birmingham)  
Email: [nmauro@uab.edu](mailto:nmauro@uab.edu)

### **Abstract**

Studying forgiveness ethnographically is challenging because there are infinitely many contextual factors and social relationships that influence any given act of forgiveness. Some researchers attempt to address these complexities by reducing forgiveness to cognitive choice, while others constrain it through models of emotional change or coping. Recent scholarship in sociology and education has begun to integrate both approaches, thereby moving toward a critical theory of forgiveness. Here, we identify the limits of critical forgiveness, giving special attention to the often taken for granted role of religion in the background discourses and practices of would-be forgivers. To achieve a truly critical theory of forgiveness, we argue for integrating anthropological studies of ritual and speech acts, while also leveraging reflexivity and critical examinations of power which recurrently influence forgiveness in their context. We demonstrate that such integration provides new ways to connect critical theories of religion with current studies of forgiveness.

## **Theorising Biopedagogies in Modern Forms of Yoga: A Dispositional Reading**

Matteo Di Placido (University of Turin)  
Email: [matteodiplacido@gmail.com](mailto:matteodiplacido@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This contribution presents the concept of biopedagogies, holding on to the understanding of how life (bios) and pedagogical work (e.g., disciplines, practices, discourses) are brought together, with a focus on modern forms of yoga. The contribution adds to this 'canonical' theorisation insights from Bourdieu's dispositional approach, thus shifting the analytical focus from biopolitical power as the final explanatory rationale to a micro-sociological focus on localised – and partly pre-conscious – apprenticeship processes and pedagogical environments. In so doing, I emphasise how biopedagogies exert their transformative and salvific effects on the life of individuals displaying, simultaneously, disciplinary traits and symbolic violence in that they reify domination through its naturalisation as legitimate thereby misrepresenting the conflicts and power imbalances implicit in those pedagogical interactions that animate the religious/spiritual field. Concluding, I re-define biopedagogies as those pedagogies of self-cultivation effective at the dispositional level and aimed at the control, manipulation, and mastering of a person's life.

### **Nearing God's Reality: Muscular Christian Healthy-Mindedness as a Negotiation Between Jamesian, Hegelian, and Marxist Theory**

Kimberly Dias (University of California, Riverside)  
Email: [kdiaz038@ucr.edu](mailto:kdiaz038@ucr.edu)

### **Abstract**

Muscular Christians' conceptualization of healthy-mindedness evinces a collaboration between Jamesian, Hegelian, and Marxist theory. Within muscular Christianity (1880-1920), a social movement that emphasized Christian masculinity, members approached a sense of utopia through their religious experiences of healthy-mindedness – “the feeling of happiness which is connected with the nearness ... of God's reality” (James) during their worship and physical exercise. Given that a seeming social crisis motivated the start of muscular Christianity and their approach to utopia, were their experiences indeterminist in nature or reacting to changing modes of social relations? By approaching the writings of prominent muscular Christians through Jamesian theory and the dialectic framework, I argue that muscular Christians attempted to demonstrate their own free will all while dependent upon the seeming crisis to shape the movement's trajectory and their experiences. This paper aims to diversify affect studies in relation to historical materialism, which is often dominated by psychoanalytic theory.

### **Understanding Swedish-Muslim women's subjectivity work through the concept of double consciousness**

Mehk Muftee (Uppsala University)  
Email: [mehk.muftee@cemfor.uu.se](mailto:mehk.muftee@cemfor.uu.se)

### **Abstract**

The concept of double consciousness, originally coined by WEB Du Bois in order to highlight the effects of slavery on African Americans, has recently been used in order to understand formulations of Muslim subjectivities in the West (For example Nasar Meers work on *Muslim*

*consciousness*). In order to further explore this convergence between Muslim Studies and Critical race studies, I will use *double consciousness* in order to analyze how Swedish-Muslim women are using art such as poetry in order to formulate their subjectivities in Sweden. The presentation will explore how double consciousness can help us understand both the negative effects as well as the potential that stems from seeing oneself through the eyes of the majority. In what way is art used as a means to explore and articulate ones subjectivity as a Muslim woman in Sweden? How can double consciousness help us further our understanding of how Muslim subjectivities are articulated?

## **Youth, Religion and Politics: Political Subjectivities of Young Christians and Muslims in Mexico City**

Edgar Zavala Pelayo (El Colegio de México)  
Email: [ezavala@colmex.mx](mailto:ezavala@colmex.mx)

### **Abstract:**

There is an emerging research field that has started to address the relations between religions and youth organizations, movements and subjectivities. Within this emerging field, only a small number of studies pays attention to the youth, the religious, *and the political*. Furthermore, within this smaller set of works there seems to be a selective attention towards the youth-religion-and-politics trio in Western societies or to the politics of young populations in Muslim African or Asian countries. Even in works that include a “global south” perspective, the religious, the political and the youth *in Latin America* are seldom a main research subject. In this presentation I seek to fill this gap by sharing preliminary results of an exploratory research project on the political subjectivities of young Catholics, neo-Pentecostals and Muslims in Mexico City. The project aims at contributing to the study of youth, religion, and politics from a historically reflexive postcolonial perspective.

## **Critical Religion (PFC 02/018)**

### **Critical Religion and Critical Enlightenment**

Timothy Fitzgerald (Centre for Critical Research on Religion, United Kingdom)  
Email: [fitzgeraldtimothy6@gmail.com](mailto:fitzgeraldtimothy6@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Critical religion is the critical study of ‘religion’ and related categories. This paper proposes that one of the significant categories related to ‘religion’ is ‘The Enlightenment’. I refer primarily to the anglophone reification, though I will make some remarks also about the French idea of *siècle des Lumières*, and Kant’s German *Aufklärung*. The idea of ‘the enlightenment’ is so thoroughly contested by historians and philosophers that it is empty of definitive content. We tend to use the term as though it is obvious what it refers to, but this is an illusion. As I have argued extensively elsewhere, much the same can be said about related categories such as religion, politics, history and progress. ‘The Enlightenment’ does not refer to any coherent idea that can be clearly identified. Historians disagree about when the enlightenment began, when and if it ended, who its key thinkers were, which were its definitive texts, and what essential ideas it promoted. There is unclarity about the distinction between the enlightenment and the anti-enlightenment, the liberal enlightenment and the radical enlightenment, the enlightenment and romanticism. A highly complex and contested idea with no clearly definitive content has been rhetorically transformed into an empty, easy-to-use sign in an automatic signalling

system that constructs various related illusions, such as modern liberal progress and development.

## **Comparing the Church of England's response to COVID-19 with New Atheism conceptions of science: Reflections on the use of Critical Religion for exploring 'religious' engagement with scientific knowledge**

Alex Fry (Durham University, United Kingdom)  
Email: [alex.d.fry@durham.ac.uk](mailto:alex.d.fry@durham.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

This paper reports findings from a thematic analysis of policy documents and semi-structured interviews. The data is drawn from the Church of England's national public policy advisors who have been responsible for guiding the denomination's engagement with COVID-19 in its societal and political role as England's established church. The paper argues that participants' rationale for the Church's response to the pandemic evinces that, for them, science has a telos rooted in the value of the dignity of the human person. It also argues that this telos and value possess affinities with those found within the New Atheism. This paper draws on this finding to affirm the insights of critical religion, particularly the need to challenge inherited traditions concerning 'religion' and on the limitations of 'religion' as a category. It then suggests some directions for future research on religion-science engagement considering this.

## **"A transcendental mobility": Human Representational Ability Before and After Secularization**

Andrea Pintimalli (Università La Sapienza – Roma Italy)  
Email: [andrea.pintimalli@uniroma1.it](mailto:andrea.pintimalli@uniroma1.it)

### **Abstract**

The multiplication of post-modern contributions to the academic study of religions forces self-reflexivity with respect to the use of the category of "religion". However, how to define the object "religion" remains an open question up to date, leaving room for new perspectives. Religious studies like all human sciences, as Foucault stated, has an intrinsically self-reflexive character. Human sciences are constantly confronted with an epistemological short-circuit generated by the fact that the human representational capacity is both their object and their necessary precondition to exist. Thus, human sciences are "constantly animated by a kind of transcendental mobility". Representation, in modern human sciences, is exercised in a self-reflective process with no transcendental reference. In religious thought, representation has its term of reference in "another world", whit abstraction intended as the discovery of an objective reality. Consequently, any humanistic attempt at defining religion results in a short-circuit over the foundations of religious studies.

## **Critical Religion and Critical Islam**

Matt Sheedy (University of Bonn)  
Email: [msheedy@uni-bonn.de](mailto:msheedy@uni-bonn.de)

### **Abstract**

The term 'critical religion' was popularized by Timothy Fitzgerald and defined as "the critical study of 'religion' and related categories." This includes paying close attention to the religion-secular binary and how it is used in specific contexts, as well as its imbrications with colonialism, constructions of race and gender, etc. More recently, Khurram Hussain has written a book on the idea of 'Critical Islam,' which he defines as a way of seeing Islam as "a rich corpus of critique" that has long engaged with questions of modernity. Since this idea is largely foreign in the West, Critical Islam is an aspirational theory aiming to reshape Western discourses on Islam by pushing the boundaries of what 'Western' history and ideas entail. In this paper, I will interrogate popular notions of critical religion by highlighting similarities and differences with Critical Islam, and ask if both of these approaches might provide analytic tools that can be productively thought about together.

## **Not about Religion: A Reinterpretation of the Chinese Rites Controversy**

Zhe Gao (University of Stirling)

Email: [zhe.gao@stir.ac.uk](mailto:zhe.gao@stir.ac.uk)

Most studies on the 'Chinese Rites Controversy' as one of the most significant events in the history of Sino-Western communication, whether created by Chinese or Western scholars, characterise it as a polemic on the religious nature of Confucianism. This paper argues that accessing this controversy through the lens of 'religion' is a serious anachronism for both sides of the conflict. While the concept of 'religion' was alien to Chinese at the time, the Vatican had a wider focus than religion as a modern sphere of human enterprise essentially distinct from the secular. More than merely a categorical dispute, the Rites controversy was essentially the first and the only confrontation between *tianxia* (all under Heaven) and Christendom as two encompassing cosmo-political ontologies before they were replaced by 'religion'.

### **Coffee break**

Saturday 11 June, 11h30-13h00

## **Religion and Northern Ireland (2) (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Véronique Altglas (Queen's University Belfast)

### **Re-Thinking the Role of Clergy in Conflict: A Case Study of Presbyterian Ministers in Northern Ireland**

Gladys Ganiel (Sociology, Queen's University Belfast)

Email: [g.ganiel@qub.ac.uk](mailto:g.ganiel@qub.ac.uk)

#### **Abstract**

Studies of religion and peacebuilding have contrasted clergy's contributions as 'prophetic' or 'priestly': prophets re-interpret their traditions for transformative change while priests reinforce the (often unjust) status quo. Omer's (2021) critique of the field has argued that the emergence of religion as 'sector' has minimized the opportunities for prophetic leadership. This paper argues that sectoral-ization also over-focuses on religious 'programmes' and fails to account for how most people who regularly practise their religion engage with clergy in violent contexts. Drawing on interviews with Presbyterian ministers who served during the Troubles (ca. 1968-1998), and churchgoing victims of violence, I argue that one of clergy's primary roles has been

overlooked: as ‘first responders’ who provide pastoral support for victims through prayer and presence. Future analysis of the role of clergy should critically analyse their pastoral role, particularly how it relates to the prophetic, the priestly, and the prospects for transformative change.

## **The Bible in Belfast, Ballymena and Bangor: Incidental Reference to Scripture in Northern Irish Politics**

J. Andrew Doole (University of Innsbruck)  
Email: [andrew.doole@uibk.ac.at](mailto:andrew.doole@uibk.ac.at)

### **Abstract**

Reference to the Bible in the political landscape of Northern Ireland is most often associated with protestant loyalism. From Ian Paisley’s heckling of the Pope as “Antichrist!” in 1988 to debates on creationism, abortion, and equal marriage, there has always been a role for scripture at Stormont (or Strasbourg!). But the Bible is also cited on matters not relating directly to policy, such as future First Minister Paul Givan’s references to “Mordecaiah” [sic!] in 2017, Ballymena councillor John Carson’s [incorrect!] claim in 2020 that “They laughed at Noah, until the rain started.”, and North Down Borough Council alderman Alan Graham’s halting the filming of a music video on his farm in 2011 and referring Rihanna to the death and resurrection of Jesus. I will examine these and other incidental references to the Bible in Northern Irish political contexts and how they are reported in mainstream and social media.

## **Roman Catholicism, Christendom, History: The Conception of John Hume’s Formula for Irish Unity**

Thomas Dolan (University of York)  
Email: [tommy.dolan@york.ac.uk](mailto:tommy.dolan@york.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

The conception of John Hume’s distinctive formula for Irish unity—his rather utopian vision of a harmonious ‘unity in diversity’ upon the island—is considered. The ideological rudiments of this formula are outlined. Hitherto neglected, unpublished manuscript materials are shown to support the contention that the key ideological components of this formula can be traced back to Hume’s education at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, the National Roman Catholic Seminary of Ireland, during the mid-1950s—particularly to the version of European history to which he was introduced by his lecturer in the subject: Revd Tomás Ó Fiaich. This essentially tracked the morphology of what Ó Fiaich termed ‘universal community’ in Western thought. New light is thus shed upon the roots of the historical and European dimensions of Hume’s influential political philosophy—so too upon the gestation of his much-admired, post-national ethos. Insights into the lesser-studied historical imagination exhibited by Ó Fiaich—who himself developed into a prominent public figure in Ireland—are likewise generated. It is suggested (at times implicitly) that existing scholarship has severed Hume’s political thought from its Roman Catholic provenance, thereby improperly isolating his thinking from a very old and sacred Catholic ideal: unity. The penultimate section of the paper goes so far as to advance the novel thesis that Hume’s seminary schooling in the evolution of liberal Catholicism nourished his formula for Irish unity. The conclusion gestures towards wider and possibly more refractory intellectual seams opened by digging down into the wellhead of Hume’s thinking about unity.

## Critical Methodology on Religion (PFC 02/017)

Session Chair: Joseph Blankholm (University of California, Santa Barbara, USA)

### A Critical Phenomenology for the Study of Religion

Joshua S. Lupo (University of Notre Dame, USA)

Email: [jlupo@nd.edu](mailto:jlupo@nd.edu)

#### Abstract

Within the study of religion, phenomenology has long been dismissed as crypto-theology by those, such as Bruce Lincoln and Russell McCutcheon, who style themselves as “critics,” rather than “caretakers,” of religion. By showing how the most famous phenomenologist of religion, Mircea Eliade, engaged only superficially with the philosophical tradition of phenomenology—e.g., the work of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl—this presentation creates an opening for a critical return to philosophical phenomenology. This return, I contend, allows us to ground the practice of critique in a historically attuned account of human agency developed by Heidegger. The essay concludes by briefly discussing *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (2019) to suggest that more robust engagement with phenomenology also gives scholars a language with which to approach a wider variety of issues, such as the insider/outsider problem, that animate the study of religion.

### Theorizing Religion and Nationalism: The Need for Critical Reflexivity in the Analysis of Overlapping Areas of Research

Liam Sutherland (University of Edinburgh (Scotland))

Email: [lmsthrld@gmail.com](mailto:lmsthrld@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

This paper will urge critical scholars of religion to apply a consistent level of reflection on emic/etic categories and contextual awareness to ‘nationalism’ as they do to ‘religion’, because these areas of study overlap considerably. As ‘nations’ and ‘nationalism’ frequently form an unavoidable part of our studies of ‘religion’, unreflective and essentialist approaches to these other categories will have an inevitably detrimental impact on our analysis of our primary subject. This is particularly important because of the rise of ‘religious nationalisms’ across the world of an often exclusionary, reactionary and sometimes violent form. As such I will address one thing that ‘religion’ and ‘nationalism’ are associated with in the popular imagination: conflict and show how many of the same assumptions are involved in accounting for their role in these events. While this is understandably alarming, it should not encourage us to abandon theoretical or empirical rigour. It should not distract from the attention from the continuous, multiple, institutional, banal and naturalised relationships between religion(s) and nationalisms which define most nation-states or sub-state nations, even the most ‘secular’ ones. In this endeavour more interdisciplinary work with scholarship on nationalism is certainly important but to a large extent it simply involves applying the same critical tools and observations from our own field.

### The Western Imaginary Born Again: A Psychoanalytic Study of Religion for Our Time



Reverend Matilda Rose Cantwell, MSW (Chaplain, Smith College, Northampton MA)  
Email: [mcantwel@smith.edu](mailto:mcantwel@smith.edu)

### **Abstract**

This paper draws on the work on feminist philosopher of religion Grace Jantzen, and her claim that the western imaginary is “necrohilic” due to its ties to eschatology in the case of theology, and drive theory in psychoanalysis. Looking at the social problems of environmental degradation and violence, with a particular focus on the cultural wars and how they play out in the contested arena of social identity/identity politics, this paper claims, with Jantzen, that a theory of “natality”-birth as opposed to death- provides us with the mechanisms of social healing and repair. This paper both draws upon the contributions of Queer Theory and brings Jantzen’s “feminist symbolic;” also derived from the influence of Irigaray and Kristeva, into conversation with the British Object Relations School of psychoanalysis, as represented by DW Winnicott, Michael Balint and others, posing a relational rather than a transactional theory of development that provides for human flourishing.

## **Literary and Film Criticism (PFC 02/018)**

Session Chair: Benjamin Fisher (University of California, Davis)  
Email: [bfisher@ucdavis.edu](mailto:bfisher@ucdavis.edu)

### **The ‘vertical’, the ‘wild’ and the ‘trivial’: On the vulgar critique of religion in Etgar Keret, Jenny Hval and Salman Rushdie**

Michael Hertzberg (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway),  
Email: [Michael.Hertzberg@hvl.no](mailto:Michael.Hertzberg@hvl.no)

### **Abstract**

Critique of religion is often trapped between the philosophical classics (Voltaire, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche) and the day-to-day violent events and (not so-) ephemeral fanatical groups. Literature, on the other hand, offers a more tempting temporal rhythm for analysis, navigating between the shores of the timely and the timeless. This paper explores how three authors challenges prudence through various forms of ‘the vulgar’: the ‘vertical’ iconoclasm of the sacrosanct in the works of Salman Rushdie, the vulgar as a form of, and way into, esoteric truth (‘the wild’) in the Norwegian multi-artist Jenny Hval’s *Paradise Rot*, and the everyday and ‘trivial’ position of religion between the daily horoscope and sex advertisement in the short stories of the Israeli author Etgar Keret. Moreover, it is my aim to use the vulgar as a rhetorical tool to reframe and reposition the nexus of prudence, religion and the critique of religion within contemporary societies.

### **A Marxist Sufi Vision: Punjabi literary imaginaries of radical change in the work of Najm Hosain Syed (B. 1936)**

Anne Murphy (University of British Columbia, Canada)  
Email: [Anne.Murphy@ubc.ca](mailto:Anne.Murphy@ubc.ca)

### **Abstract**

This paper will explore the contours of a Sufi Marxist imaginary in the poetic, theatrical and literary critical work of Najm Hosain Syed (b. 1936), a major figure in the Punjabi language

movement of Pakistan. The Marxist affiliations of Syed and allied cultural workers have been the focus of most readings of Syed's corpus, as we can see in the work of Sara Kazmi, Virinder Kalra, and Waqas Butt. This article builds on this prior work to understand the operation of religion in Syed's work, and particularly the ways in which figures such as the Sufi poet Shah Hussain (16<sup>th</sup> c.) represent, for Syed, a means for imagining a radical present grounded in a religious inheritance. Through this example, we explore a broader reading of Marxist thought and practice, and simultaneously consider the radical potentialities of a religious position.

## Lunch Break

Saturday 11 June, 14h00-16h00

### **Critical Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Matt Sheedy (University of Bonn)  
Email: [msheedy@uni-bonn.de](mailto:msheedy@uni-bonn.de)

### **The Language of Liberation Theology During Covid-19: An Evaluation Through Caritas Mexico**

Xochiquetzal Luna Morales (Wilfrid Laurier University)  
Email: [luna9500@mylaurier.ca](mailto:luna9500@mylaurier.ca)

#### **Abstract**

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the work and importance of faith-based organizations (FBOs) to assist vulnerable populations. By alleviating urgent needs such as food, housing, or access to healthcare and jobs, to name a few, these organizations redefine notions of human development and assistance. In Mexico, Caritas has played a vital role in providing relief by establishing alliances with secular institutions and companies while amplifying through social media and the web the Church's message of integral human development. Using critical discourse analysis, this paper examines how Caritas Mexico foresees and envisions a 'liberation of the poor' amid this pandemic. Specifically, it focuses on how the founding principles of liberation theology are present or not in the current discourses of the Mexican branch of one of the most important FBOs globally at a time where the health and economic crisis open new paths to restore justice and dignity to people in need.

### **“Jewish Messianism and Radical Hope: The Political Afterlives of Gustav Landauer and Ernst Bloch.”**

Adam Sutcliffe (Kings College London)  
Email: [adam.sutcliffe@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:adam.sutcliffe@kcl.ac.uk)

#### **Abstract**

The cross-fertilization of Jewish prophetic idealism and messianism with revolutionary political radicalism reached its greatest intensity in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, when left-wing Jewish intellectuals played a leading role in the short-lived revolutionary

regimes briefly established in Munich and Budapest. This paper will focus on the resonance of Judaism, and in particular notions of messianism and Jewish political purpose, in the radical thinking that shaped this era. It will focus on the writings of Gustav Landauer (1870-1919), who died defending the Munich revolution, and Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), whose *Spirit of Utopia* (1918) was seminal, and who continued discreetly exploring these ideas in East Germany in the 1950s (*The Principle of Hope*, 1955-59). The paper will also explore the links between the work of these writers and the continued traces of the theme of Jewish messianic idealism in recent and contemporary left-wing thought.

### **“Out of Orbit: Adorno, Judaism, and the Critique of Astrology.”**

Benjamin Fisher (University of California, Davis)

Email: [bfisher@ucdavis.edu](mailto:bfisher@ucdavis.edu)

Although seemingly prohibited by the Bible and the Talmud as pagan idolatry, zodiacal speculation surfaces throughout Jewish history among the lay populace as well as rabbis and philosophers. With this rift in view, in this paper I address the resonances between Jewish ambivalence toward astrology and Theodor Adorno’s writings on occultism set within the context of his exile in California and return to Germany. Following others who identify similarities between Adorno’s philosophy and strains of Jewish thought, I argue that Adorno’s critique of astrology is thoroughly Maimonidean. Turning to Maimonides’ “Letter on Astrology,” I show that just as his critique contends with the proximity of astrology to medieval science, Adorno’s critique contends with astrology’s imbrication with capitalist modernity. Although for both Judaism as a religion of reason ostensibly serves as the antidote to astrology, their positions remain haunted by the actual ambiguities of Jewish history and the contradictions of disenchantment.

### **Is Habermas’s philosophy of religion still critical?**

Frédéric Menager (EHESS, France)

Email: [menaps@yahoo.fr](mailto:menaps@yahoo.fr)

#### **Abstract**

Habermas’s Philosophy of Religion has the particularity to mix two different approaches. On the one hand, Habermas has supported a political philosophy of religion that has been discussing the terms and conditions of the participation of the believers and communities of faith to the public debate, and that has described their specific agency among the communicational community members. On the other hand, Habermas has developed an anthropology of religion connecting Durkheim’s and Mead’s theories about the ritual foundations of society. He recently elaborated a genealogical approach of Western history, focused on the rise of secular reason. However, Habermas has always avoided discussing the potential use of religious concepts as critical material against the lack of social justice and the use of religion as an tool of alienation. Should we consider Habermas’s work as giving up all critical content or as giving us criteria to distinguish public reason from other kinds of discourse?

### **Religion and the Environment (PFC 02/017)**

Session Chair: Bruce Worthington (University of Toronto, Canada)

Email: [bruce.worthington@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:bruce.worthington@mail.utoronto.ca)

## **Exploring the Less-Explored Power of Religious Actors in Mobilization, in Nigeria**

Okwuaku Anselm (Society for Rural Development and Empowerment)  
Dr Amaechi Kingsley Ekene (University of Venda, South Africa)  
Email: [kingsleyokafor06@gmail.com](mailto:kingsleyokafor06@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Of all social institutions in the African socio-political space, religion (through its actors) seems to enjoy the most credit of trust when they partner with NGOs in environmental activism. Amidst environmental activism, religious actors remain one of the most reliable and trusted pillars for sustained mobilization. This is mainly because, they are perceived to possess social characteristics such as honesty, respect and closeness to the communities, which on the pragmatic level, make it easier for people to listen to them. Within such a context, they are able to easily help the NGO sell their message to the local population. This paper evaluates this theoretical assumption through a critical analysis of two religious actors' (a Pentecostal pastor and a Muslim Cleric) involvement in making the local population participate in an NGO's (Society for Rural Development and Empowerment) environmental assignment, during the COVID-19 pandemic, in Mushin Lagos, Nigeria. Drawing from internal data from the NGO, the paper explores how the involvement of the local religious actors provides an important social space for mobilization.

## **Delegitimizing religion and with “religion”: criticism of climate politics in Finland**

Tuomas Äystö (Study of religion, University of Helsinki), speaking author  
Email: [tuomas.aysto@helsinki.fi](mailto:tuomas.aysto@helsinki.fi)  
Jere Kyyrö (Study of religion, University of Turku)  
Titus Hjelm (Study of religion, University of Helsinki)

### **Abstract**

After the climate crisis returned as a central political topic to intra- and extra-parliamentary politics in the late 2010s, several critics argued that the new climate politics and activism resemble or constitute a religion. For example, the leading young figure Greta Thunberg was called the “high priestess of the Extinction Rebellion,” and her “message of doom” was more like “religion than reality” by The Times columnist Iain Martin in July 2020. We investigate similar language use in the Finnish context, where, as it turns out, similar claims are made quite regularly. In general terms, we propose a double-dichotomy division of discourse use into four categories, where the combinations of legitimating and delegitimizing religion, as well as legitimating and delegitimizing \*with\* religion, are taken into account. The portrayal of climate politics and activism as “religion” is a good example of both delegitimizing religion as well as delegitimizing with religion. In addition to this being a way of saying something needs not to be taken seriously since it is irrational like religion supposedly is, it is also a way to underline (in the case of activists, often with some links to the parliamentary Greens) the purportedly improper forms of political action and organizing. In certain instances, such comparisons are made to highlight the anti-capitalism of climate activism.

## **Damned Ecologies: Evangelical Climate Scepticism in Christian Nationalist Times**

S. Jonathon O'Donnell (Visiting Scholar, Queen's University Belfast)  
Email: [sjodonnell@gmail.com](mailto:sjodonnell@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The influence of Christian nationalism and climate change scepticism among white American evangelicals is well-attested. Engaging in a cross-section of evangelical texts published 2008–2018, this paper analyses the links they create between a disavowed threat of environmental destruction and the demonisations of marginalised groups. Drawing on critical race and decolonial scholarship, the paper unpacks how—despite explicit denials of anthropogenic climate change—the texts leverage environmental and ecological concepts to navigate justify (racialised) hierarchies of being—one's climate action is seen as disrupting. The paper shows how the works analysed situate humans and non-humans within economies of salvation that utilise religious logic to justify bio- and necropolitical processes that make live and let die. The resulting paradigm condemns forms of social, political and environmental ecology that do not privilege a narrow conception of the human—figured along sexed, raced, religious, and geopolitical lines—to social, political, and spiritual damnation.

### **Coffee break**

Saturday 16h30-18h00

### **'Critical Religion' beyond Religious Studies: Towards Critical Study of Modernity (panel) (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Timothy Fitzgerald (Centre for Critical Research on Religion, United Kingdom)

### **Panel Abstract**

This panel discusses Mitsutoshi Horii's *'Religion' and 'Secular' Categories in Sociology: Decolonizing the Modern Myth* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). This book deconstructs the religious-secular distinction in social theory and sociology. By claiming that what we call 'religion' and 'secularity' share commonalities, it also hopes that method and theory in the study of religion could be useful to analyse the mythology of ostensibly 'secular' modernity. The questions asked in this panel could include: Should scholars of religion analyse the modern myth, which includes the metaphysical beliefs in 'science' (including Social Sciences), as well as the soteriology and ritual orders in 'politics' and 'economy'? Could this be one of the directions in which the academic study of religion move forward? What are the practical applications of this book for the critical study of religion? This session critically engages with Horii's take on 'critical religion.'

### **Panelists:**

Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa)  
Email: [naomi4339@rogers.com](mailto:naomi4339@rogers.com)  
Suzanne Owen (Leeds Trinity University)  
Email: [S.Owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:S.Owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk)  
Alex Henley (The Institute of Ismaili Studies)  
Email: [AHenley@iis.ac.uk](mailto:AHenley@iis.ac.uk)

**Responding:**

Mitsutoshi Horii (Shumei University)

Email: [horii@mailg.shumei-u.ac.jp](mailto:horii@mailg.shumei-u.ac.jp)

**Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Race (PFC 02/017)**

Session Chair: Nalika Gajaweera (University of Southern California)

**Accounting for Reconciliation: A Racial Capitalist Etymology**

Whitney Wilkinson Arreche (Duke University, USA)

Email: [whitney.wilkinson@duke.edu](mailto:whitney.wilkinson@duke.edu)

**Abstract**

Hortense Spillers, Toni Morrison, and Anibal Quijano name words weapons. Reconciliation, though revered in Christianity, has historically been a weapon in the arsenal of whiteness. Its violence is exposed through a theo-historical analysis of reconciliation accounting, known as double-entry bookkeeping. Italian friar and mathematician Luca Pacioli, the “Father of modern accounting,” published his process in 1494, at the advent of the transatlantic slave trade. It was then used to legally lodge racialized flesh into slavery ledgers, subjecting Black bodies with the name of Jesus upon every page. Pacioli’s reconciliation displayed the murderous union between theology and economics and its bearing upon bodies. This paper focuses primarily on Luca Pacioli, and how his reconciliation became theo-economic canon for both Church and state, creating the conditions for profiting upon humans as reconcilable and fungible. A case is then made for rupturing and rejecting the overrepresentation of reconciliation language in racial peace narratives.

**Decolonising Religion and Globalising Philosophy – A Pluriversal–Universal Tension?**

Karen O’Brien-Kop (University of Roehampton, United Kingdom)

Email: [karen.obrien-kop@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:karen.obrien-kop@roehampton.ac.uk)

**Abstract**

For scholars researching non-western traditions, the line between religion and philosophy can be blurred, and the prevailing ways in which decolonial theory is employed in both disciplines can produce tensions. Decolonial theory uses the concept of the pluriversal (Mbembe 2016) to deconstruct the hegemony of the universal so that epistemology is pluralised and diverse traditions are equally considered (or even provincialized, e.g. Chakrabarty 2001). This is evident in philosophy as a commitment to make the field of enquiry more inclusive (e.g., in how Carpenter investigates Plato and Vasubandhu equally). However, the study of religion approaches the ‘global’ distinctly, since the colonial formation of the discipline means that scholars are still correcting the distortions of the ‘world religions’ paradigm. Hence, the decolonial imperative is to critique religious studies as beyond reform (Nye 2019). However, philosophy often aims towards a more constructive notion of the universal by emphasizing engagement between traditions – as evident in evolving disciplinary names such as global philosophy, intercultural philosophy, world philosophy, and so forth. While ‘religion’ is being withdrawn from the categorical world stage in favour of understanding localised knowledges

(a pluriversal approach), regional philosophies (e.g., Hindu, Maori, Indigenous) are only just being placed together, unified, on a philosophy world stage. This paper will explore these critical tensions and ask how scholars who work at the interface of religion and philosophy can respond to these dynamics.

## **Judicial religion-making in a colonized territory: The Naha Confucius Temple lawsuit and Japan's imperial legacy**

Ernils Larsson (Uppsala University, Sweden)  
Email: [ernils.larsson@teol.uu.se](mailto:ernils.larsson@teol.uu.se)

### **Abstract**

In February of 2021, the Japanese Supreme Court handed down a ruling concluding that, despite being registered as a general corporation, a small Confucius temple on Okinawa was in fact a religious institution, and that consequently the local government's generous treatment of the temple was a violation of the principle of secularism in the 1947 constitution. Enacted during the American occupation after World War II, the constitution strictly prohibits public actors from participating in religious activities and from using public money to promote religious institutions. This paper will explore the processes whereby the temple, despite the claims of the organization behind it, came to be considered a *de facto religious* institution by the judiciary. Building on earlier work conducted on processes of religion-making in Japan's courts of law, the paper will situate the ruling in a context of Okinawa as a colonized territory existing under a hegemonic foreign state, to show how legal understandings of *religion* are used to force a local minority culture to conform to the paradigms of dominant nation-state.

## **Secularism, the Post-secular, and Secularization (PFC 02/018)**

Session Chair: Andrea Pintimalli (Università La Sapienza – Roma Italy)  
Email: [andrea.pintimalli@uniroma1.it](mailto:andrea.pintimalli@uniroma1.it)

## **Secular Feelings: Mapping the Affective Terrain of Secular Life**

Joseph Blankholm and Shakir Stephen (University of California, Santa Barbara USA)  
Email: [blankholm@ucsb.edu](mailto:blankholm@ucsb.edu)  
Email: [shakirstephen@ucsb.edu](mailto:shakirstephen@ucsb.edu)

### **Abstract**

Though secular people are often skeptical of feelings, emotions provide valuable insights about the life-paths that secular people understand themselves to take. This paper identifies those paths by focusing on secular feelings. It observes what makes a path secular, what secular people avoid by staying on it, the disagreements that cause it to fork, and how it feels to travel with others or alone. To map the affective terrain of secular life, this paper relies on the largest-ever survey of organized nonbelievers in the United States (n=12,370). With other researchers, the authors coded and analyzed tens of thousands of responses to open-ended questions to identify the presence of strong emotional language and explicit references to feelings. In its focus on narrative and emotions, this paper outlines a social scientific approach that is just as useful for understanding the spiritual and the religious as it is the secular.

## **Religious immigrant effects? Immigrant dimensions of the demography of religion in Canada**

Jungwee Park (University of Ottawa & Statistics Canada)  
Email: [jungwee@yahoo.com](mailto:jungwee@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

Using the most recent two census data on religion (2011 and 2001), this study attempts to investigate the association between immigrant status and religious affiliation in Canada. In 2011, immigrants were more likely to be an adherent of a religion compared to non-immigrants in Canada: 75% of non-immigrant Canadians reported being religiously affiliated compared to 80% of immigrants. Though immigrants made up 21% of the total population, they accounted for 60% of those who have faith in non-Christian religions. Especially, immigrants in younger age groups (younger than 45) were more likely to be religiously affiliated than their non-immigrant counterparts, whereas immigrants older than 54 were less likely to have a religion than the same age groups of non-immigrant population. A longitudinal analysis showed that as the years since immigration increased, the rate of religious affiliation declined. However, the decrease between 2001 and 2011 reported by immigrants tended to concentrate on sects of Christianity. The number of immigrants affiliated with other religions was stable. Based on multi-variate analysis, this study discusses specific factors that make significant effects on religious affiliations for immigrant and non-immigrant people in Canada.

## **Towards Critical Secular Studies in Education: Addressing Secular Education Formations and their Intersecting Inequalities**

Reza Gholami and Karl Kitching (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom)  
Email: [k.kitching@bham.ac.uk](mailto:k.kitching@bham.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

This paper lays the ground for systematic inquiry into the relationship between secular societal formations and education inequalities. We use a theory adaptation methodology to review existing scholarship on the secular and postsecular in education. Our review of 169 texts reveals a frequent normalisation of the liberal state as the arbiter of problems of secular/religious domination. Taking a critical sociological approach, we argue this trend neglects the state's regulation, as opposed to its elimination, of the violence of multiple education inequalities. Understanding state sovereignty as an assemblage of forces within and beyond state territories, we highlight how secular colonial and neoliberal regimes *define and allocate* minority religious authority over the contingently private spheres of family and identity, and contingently *redefine and deprivatise* that authority. Finally, we outline illustrative trajectories for a Critical Secular Studies research and curriculum agenda that addresses multiple education inequalities, including those of gender, sexuality, and race.

## **Freedom of Religion in post-secular Australia**

Adam Possamai (Western Sydney University, Australia)  
Email: [a.possamai@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:a.possamai@westernsydney.edu.au)

### **Abstract**



Habermas coined the term post-secularism to reflect a time period in which religions are given a more central part in social and political life. Even if there is more openness to religion, many religious groups would claim that Western societies are nevertheless still dominated by secularism and want to ensure that freedom of religion and belief remain protected and promoted. This article explores the recent Australian Religious Freedom Review as a case study of the social tension between freedom for and from religion to argue that we might have moved beyond a post-secular sphere in this country. In this phase, what is meant by freedom of religion has shifted from a focus in having all religious groups being able to freely practice their faith to a focus by some mainstream religions to remain free to discriminate on the basis of their faith.

Sunday 12 June, 09h00-11h00

## **The End of Religion – Feminist Reappraisals of the State (panel) (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Sarah-Jane Page (Aston University, UK)

Email: [s.page1@aston.ac.uk](mailto:s.page1@aston.ac.uk)

### **Respondent**

Suzanne Owen (Leeds Trinity University)

Email: [s.owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk](mailto:s.owen@leedstrinity.ac.uk)

### **Panel Abstract**

“The end of religion,” refers to the end of considering religion to be a distinct, standalone phenomenon. Feminist theory has not yet examined how the assumption that religion is natural, timeless, and omnipresent supports sexist oppression. By deconstructing the category of religion, critical religion has much to offer feminist analysis. Panelists contribute to critical religion particularly concerning gender politics by discussing religion as a strategic category of contemporary patriarchal statecraft. Religions, they argue, ought to be understood as “vestigial states,” i.e., marginalized governments within dominant sovereignties. Although the power that religions have is truncated, religious institutions retain status and privileges that disadvantage women significantly. Panelists apply this theory to specific political contexts and discourses. Each has authored a chapter in a new book with the same title as the panel: *The End of Religion: Feminist Reappraisals of the State*, McPhillips & Goldenberg, eds. Abingdon & N.Y.: Routledge, 2021.

### **Religion as a Vestigial State: Contested Statecraft and Gendered Violence in Australia**

Kathleen McPhillips (University of Newcastle, Australia) [\(video\)](#)

Email: [Kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Kathleen.mcphillips@newcastle.edu.au)

### **Abstract**

This presentation considers examples of gendered violence in Australian society in the context of reading religion as a vestigial state. Religions are conceived as political entities, as “once and future” states, that enjoy privileges in neo-liberal societies as distinctive institutions. These institutions are patriarchal in that many incorporate claims to a male divinity, male headship, and a male lineage in religious leadership. Like formal states, they also promote gendered forms of violence by which women are positioned as boundary markers of contested power relations between secular and religious men. Muslim women are consistently denied agency and construed as voiceless, passive, and dominated by Muslim men. Such discourse enjoys popular circulation, despite counter voices and contestations. Theorizing violence against women in a framework that treats religion as a vestigial state creates a productive space for feminism to re-think the politics of state power, religious authority, and male hegemony.

### **Donald Trump and the Growth of Christian Nationalism in U.S. Government**

Rebekah Carere (St. Mary's University, London).

Email: [Rebekah.carere@gmail.com](mailto:Rebekah.carere@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This presentation examines how understanding religion as supporting a vestigial patriarchal state clarifies policies and ideologies connected with the presidency of Donald Trump and the evolution of Christian Nationalist culture in America (e.g., Kristin Du Mez). Prior to Donald Trump's becoming president, references to religion and biblicisms were used to cleanse and excuse his well-known misogyny in order to garner votes. Upon Trump's election, the use of religion, specifically Christianity, morphed into a support for sexist attitudes and legislation. My argument is that with the election of Donald Trump, Christianity functioned to validate Trump's behaviour toward women and to authorize the violence and oppression that has long existed in Christian Nationalist culture as state-approved.

### **Nostalgia, Masculinity and the Vestigial State of Religion**

Naomi Goldenberg (University of Ottawa, Canada)

Email: [Naomi4339@rogers.com](mailto:Naomi4339@rogers.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper builds on my chapter, titled "The Religious is Political", in *The End of Religion: Feminist Reappraisals of the State*. I will discuss how understanding religion as a category of statecraft contributes to feminist analysis regarding the persistence of male hegemony in contemporary governments. I will link recent work about masculinity, sovereignty and governance (e.g., *Strongmen* by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and *Sovereign Masculinity* by Bonnie Mann) with *The Sexual Contract* by Carole Pateman, a classic feminist text. My argument that the positioning of "religion" as marginalized government within dominant government expands Pateman's political theory about a prior contract of female subjection that underlies recognized social contracts pertaining to employment and individual rights. This line of thinking fleshes out feminist theory about nostalgia for idealized male rulership that is a persistent characteristic of authoritarian political movements.

### **Unveiling Critique, or What Do We Do with Christianity? (panel) (PFC 02/017)**

Session Chair: Joseph Blankholm (UC-Santa Barbara)

Email: [blankholm@ucsb.edu](mailto:blankholm@ucsb.edu)

Panel:

Lucas McCracken (UC-Santa Barbara)

Samantha Kang (UC-Santa Barbara)

Tim Snediker (UC-Santa Barbara)

Joseph Blankholm (UC-Santa Barbara)

### **Panel Abstract**

Writing and reading now, in English, all of us are Christian, even if we are not. What do we do with our Christianity, our secularity, and the rest of what we inherit from empire? This panel addresses these questions by unveiling critique. It proposes an approach, indebted to both Heidegger and Foucault, that unveils what we share by identifying what is contingent, even as

the unveiled remains impossible to name. Our inquiry is both philosophical and empirical. It begins with an archival mystery and proceeds by answering vital questions: How do we account for Christianity's afterlife and articulate what is not Christian in other than Christian terms? And how can critique become a lived practice for scholars without reducing them to mere critics of the statements and actions of others? In unveiling critique we find within ourselves both a monstrous inheritance and a demand for a uniquely human relation to Being.

## **What Lies Beneath: Phenomenology and the Archaeology of Knowledge**

Lucas McCracken (UC-Santa Barbara)

### **Abstract**

In this paper, I will interpret Michel Foucault's never before transcribed or translated notes on Martin Heidegger to show how Foucauldian critique cooperates with Heideggerian phenomenology to uncover what we share beneath the sediment of our historical differences. Heidegger describes the universal conditions of human existence, or the "ontological structures of Dasein." Foucault, however, chips away at inherited "truths" through his "archaeology of knowledge," which renders our traditional certainties uncertain by digging into their historical contingency and showing us the processes of their ossification. The deep antagonism between phenomenology and historical critique is that while the phenomenologist tries to derive universal truths from local contingencies, the archaeologist of knowledge topples longstanding "universals" by unearthing their contingent foundations. Nevertheless, Foucault once divulged that "My entire philosophical development was determined by Heidegger." Through a reading of Foucault's unpublished notes on Heidegger, I will argue for a synthesis of historical critique and phenomenology.

## **Vladimir Jankélévitch: Haunted by Heidegger**

Samantha Kang (UC-Santa Barbara)

### **Abstract**

In this paper I reconsider Vladimir Jankélévitch's relationship to Martin Heidegger, noting that his supposed wholesale rejection seems instead to be something more akin to an ambivalent inheritance. Insofar as he is remembered in the anglophone world, the philosopher—and French resistance fighter of Jewish descent—is famous for his critique of Heidegger. In the post-war years, Jankélévitch refused to cite the German philosopher as a matter of principle, even going so far as to excise previous references from his published work. Despite his outspoken denials, Jankélévitch works constructively along Heideggerian pathways (as we see in his work on boredom and death) while simultaneously attempting to purify philosophy through the erasure of the very name 'Heidegger.' The successes and failures of this hyperbolic critique give us occasion to consider the ways in which repression allows us to repeat, and forgetting allows us to remember, what we would rather deny.

## **Reading the Mind of God: On the Afterlife of Christianity**

Timothy Snediker (UC-Santa Barbara)

### **Abstract**

In this paper, I take up Walter Benjamin's concept of a translation as the afterlife of a text and attempt a reading of the afterlife of Christianity. I am interested in the way that Christianity 'lives on' in our discourses, and, in particular, in the influence of Martin Heidegger's translation of Christian theological concepts from their historical and existential situations into his theory of ecstatic temporality. While Heidegger owes an obvious debt to Christianity, I'll argue that Christianity, too, owes an important, if ambivalent, debt to Heidegger. Ditto Heidegger's inheritors (Derrida, Foucault, Agamben), to say nothing of our own discourses, which continue the difficult, fraught work of translation. Indeed, this work of translation is one way to be secular. If we want to understand what it means to be secular, we should ask ourselves what—or who—is unveiled by our translations, and what sorts of veiling attend our unveilings.

## **Controlling for Christianity's Inheritance in Social Scientific Research**

Joseph Blankholm (UC-Santa Barbara)

Email: [blankholm@ucsb.edu](mailto:blankholm@ucsb.edu)

### **Abstract**

"Religion" as a concept and category arises from a particular cultural inheritance. "Religions" around the world—as well as spirituality and superstitions—are analogues to European referents, created through the efforts of colonizers and Christian missionaries who sought to find universals in the decidedly specific. How do researchers working in European languages, using Christian concepts, describe ways of life that are less and less organized by Christianity? And how do scholars reassess existing work on parts of life that have never been properly Christian? This paper answers these questions in unveiling critique, which demands neither silence nor a new Esperanto. The paper relies on several years of ethnographic research on very secular people, the largest-ever survey of organized nonbelievers in the United States, and ongoing research on the intergenerational transmission of values to provide practical ways to attend to the sedimented ground on which we stand and proceed ahead with gathering and building.

## **Biblical Criticism and Criticism of Sacred Texts (PFC 02/018)**

Session Chair: J. Andrew Doole (University of Innsbruck)

Email: [andrew.doole@uibk.ac.at](mailto:andrew.doole@uibk.ac.at)

## **Abraham Ibn Ezra on the Torah's Authorship: A Medieval Precedent for Biblical Criticism?**

Eran Viezel (Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel)

Email: [eviezel@bgu.ac.il](mailto:eviezel@bgu.ac.il)

### **Abstract**

Critical biblical scholarship emerged in the early modern period, yet scholars frequently search for precursors to it among medieval commentators who adopted critical positions—and many mention Abraham Ibn Ezra (Spain–England, 1089–1164/7) in this context. Indeed, in several places, Ibn Ezra claims that there are verses in the Torah that were added to it after the time of Moses; and some major thinkers and scholars in the early modern period (for example,

Baruch Spinoza) were aware of these remarks and influenced by them. However, Ibn Ezra's belief that the Torah includes verses added at a later time is not based on the considerations that led the founders of critical biblical scholarship to their conclusion that Moses did not write the Torah. Ibn Ezra's positions on the question of the Torah's authorship are an example of the fact that similarity in conclusions and even in interpretive methodology should not obscure the different interpretive and attitudinal points of departure that distinguish traditional biblical interpretation from critical biblical scholarship. Ultimately, a chasm exists between the views of Ibn Ezra and those of critical thinkers such as Spinoza.

## **Posthumanism(s), Althusser, and the Power of the Proper Name**

Joseph Kimmel (Harvard University, USA)

Email: [jlk623@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:jlk623@mail.harvard.edu)

### **Abstract**

In recent decades, posthumanist philosophers have argued persuasively for scholars to embrace an expanded ontological scope. Such views have begun to inform biblical studies (e.g., in the work of Stephen Moore), but the influence of posthumanist arguments on this field remains nascent. This paper seeks to advance the use of a posthumanist critical lens in biblical scholarship by reading Mark 5:1-13 in light of posthumanist arguments. In so doing, this paper will shift the interpretive focus away from individual human "actors" (e.g., Jesus) to the multiple ontologies and agencies collectively active in this exorcistic scene, attending especially to the underappreciated agency of proper names ("Legion"). Specifically, the paper examines how Legion's use of Jesus' name (and vice versa) works to influence the conduct of the referenced being in their exorcistic battle. This influence occurs, in part, via an onomastically compelled subjectification, à la Althusser's theory of *interpellation*.

## **Populist Features in the Book of Revelation**

Bruce Worthington (University of Toronto, Canada)

Email: [bruce.worthington@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:bruce.worthington@mail.utoronto.ca)

### **Abstract**

Populism (which has roots in the *Populares* of the Late Roman Republic) typically coincides with what Ernesto Laclau calls a "chain of unfulfilled demands" and seeks to reconstruct a nation or "people" around a new political core. Using the work of contemporary political theorist Ernesto Laclau, this paper interrogates populist elements in the book of Revelation, in particular the Christ groups of Asia minor. These elements include:

- 1) A singular leader who participates in the very substance of the community
- 2) An equivalential chain of unsatisfied demands
- 3) A partiality which views itself as the totality
- 4) The reconstruction of a nation around a new political core

Identifying populist elements in the primary texts of early Christianity helps to clarify the bible's role in contemporary populist politics and the related field of Christian nationalism.

## **The orientation of the Ka'ba to Jerusalem: two sanctuaries. An older love affair?**

Rob Fuller (University of Exeter, UK)  
Email: [rcf209@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:rcf209@exeter.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

The primary question of this paper stems from one apparently undocumented observation; that, the Ka'ba in Mecca, appears to be physically orientated toward Jerusalem. The secondary question is why there were paintings of Abraham, Jesus, and Mary in the Ka'ba at the time of its cleansing from idols by Muḥammad in 630 C.E.. These two questions lead to a study of the Jewish messianic tradition of the *Messiah ben Joseph* in Hebrew texts and sacred art, and its presence in the Hebrew gospel of the Jewish Nazoraeans, and in the alleged Jewish restitution of sacrifices in the Temple in 614 C.E. by the Josephite figure, Neḥemiah ben Hushiel at the time of the Persian occupation of Jerusalem. The conclusion of the paper suggests the Ka'ba in Mecca had been a "House of Abraham", within a Hebrew messianic tradition of the Ephraimite Messiah maintained by the Jewish movement of the Nazoraeans.

### **Coffee break**

Sunday 12 June, 11h30-13h00

### **Religion and Politics (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Titus Hjelm (Study of religion, University of Helsinki)  
Email: [titus.hjelm@helsinki.fi](mailto:titus.hjelm@helsinki.fi)

### **Everyday Hindutva: Critical ethnography of non-electoral strategies of Hindu Nationalism in South India**

Dayal Paleri (IIT Madras, Chennai India / School of Divinity, The University of Edinburgh, UK)  
Email: [dayalpaleri@gmail.com](mailto:dayalpaleri@gmail.com)

R. Santhosh (IIT Madras, Chennai India)  
Email: [rsanthosh@iitm.ac.in](mailto:rsanthosh@iitm.ac.in)

### **Abstract**

In the southern state of Kerala, the Hindu nationalist politics find itself in the margins as they were unable to register any electoral success despite their hegemonic political and cultural presence in all other parts of India. The successive electoral defeat of the BJP (Indian People's Party) in the state leads to the assumption that Hindu nationalism in Kerala is anomalous to its mainstream political culture. However, through a critical ethnography of the everyday activities of the Hindu nationalist organizational network in central Kerala, this paper challenges the mainstream academic conceptions about the marginality of Hindu nationalism in the state and argues that the Hindu nationalist network led by the RSS (National volunteer organization) uses a strategy of constructing a Hindu political majority through non-electoral organizations intervening in the arena of service (through Seva Bharathi), temple protection (through Kshethra samrakshana Samiti) and spirituality (through Vivekananda Kendra). We argue that this mode of politics that focuses on everyday life leads to the formation of aggressive Hindu majoritarian sensibilities in the region's religious and familial spaces that have the prospect of translating into a political majority.

## **How did a religious metaphor become political under the Trump presidency?**

Jeanne Deysson (University of Strasbourg)  
Christophe Monnot (University of Strasbourg)  
Email: [jeanne.deysson2@etu.unistra.fr](mailto:jeanne.deysson2@etu.unistra.fr)  
Email: [cmonnot@unistra.fr](mailto:cmonnot@unistra.fr)

### **Abstract**

This paper will focus on the emergence of a biblical metaphor in the American Pentecostal milieu calling the members to spiritual warfare against “the spirit of Jezebel,” a spirit of evil that would dominate the USA. In analyzing the preaching, we noted that the network promoting this struggle was not theologians but *independent media entrepreneurs* at the crossing of religious, media and economic fields. They had a stake in Trump's presidency to ensure the success of their business. Their “spiritual” authority within both the network and the Pentecostal field is built on their audience.

Mass media platforms are formative authorities within the network. They control the borders of the network and the standards of the discourses. They position themselves as prophetic *alternative* media. They tend to impose a nationalist-Christian interpretation of the American society via the reinforcement of the symbolic framework and of the male domination structuring the social order.

## **The spectre of liberalism and Neo-Marxism is haunting Europe: Political interventions of the Catholic hierarchy in Slovakia and its struggle for ‘traditional values’**

Marian Sekerak (AMBIS College, Prague, Czech Republic)  
Email: [marian.sekerak@ambis.cz](mailto:marian.sekerak@ambis.cz)

### **Abstract**

Slovakia is traditionally considered a relatively highly religious country with a strong influence of the Catholic Church. Although the real numbers of believers decline with each census (the last one was held in 2021), interventions, especially by Catholic hierarchy, in public space and politics are relatively frequent and noteworthy. This article will present the most important of these interventions in the last approx. 20 years, while clarifying the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state. This undertakes within the traditional Catholic agenda: the anti-choice (“pro-life”) movement, the negative attitude towards the rights of LGBTQ minority, and the issues of Catholic education. Consequently, it will be clarified that the official Catholic narrative, especially in recent years, is an ideological mixture of social conservatism, cultural anti-modernism, anti-Rationalism, and the fear of progressivism and liberalism. Based on the discourse analysis of various speech acts (speeches, homilies, interviews and written texts), the cultural backlash and motivations of its agents in a Central-European country will be explained.

## **Religion and the Digital (PFC 02/017)**



Session Chair: Michael Hertzberg (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway),  
Email: [Michael.Hertzberg@hvl.no](mailto:Michael.Hertzberg@hvl.no)

## **Artificial intelligence and the way to learn religion: the current challenges of Indonesian Islam**

Hamzah Fansuri (Institute of Anthropology, Heidelberg University) (video)  
Email: [hamzah.fansuri@uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:hamzah.fansuri@uni-heidelberg.de)

Mohammad Rokib (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main)  
Email: [rokib@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:rokib@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

Zakiyuddin Baidhaway (The State Islamic Institute of Salatiga)  
Email: [zbaidhaway@gmail.com](mailto:zbaidhaway@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The increase in artificial intelligence (AI) constantly colours every dimension of life globally. In this article, we will discuss how AI works in leading everyone to learn religion through so-called algorithms. By focusing on websites that contain religious content, namely [www.muslim.or.id](http://www.muslim.or.id) and [www.bincangsyariah.com](http://www.bincangsyariah.com), we will show that there has been an unprecedented change in the practice of studying religion. Through AI, the computer-assisted approach and accessible data resources on the internet, the two websites that are not affiliated with the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama) have extended the main reference for Muslims in learning their religion. Thus, everyone can learn self-taught religion, such as reading medieval classics and learning the procedures for worship according to the *Sharia*. Using analytical tools and extensive literature study, we argue that AI has not only changed the way people learn religion, it is also a serious challenge to traditional religious authorities.

## **Islam in the digital age - between Neoliberalism and Subversion**

Rosa Lütge (University of Bremen)  
Email: [luetge@uni-bremen.de](mailto:luetge@uni-bremen.de)

### **Abstract**

Websites and Social Media platforms offer low-threshold opportunities of participation for marginalized groups. In my research I focus on Muslim online platforms in Europe that negotiate Muslim lifestyle and everyday practices, e. g., about food, fashion, fitness, but also reflections about Islam such as religious practices and spirituality. Moreover, these platforms aim to empower young Muslims and address political and societal issues including racism and islamophobia. Based on the work of Critical Theory such as Eva Illouz, post-structuralist and post-colonial theory, my paper examines the entanglement of neoliberal and individualistic ideas of the self, religion and subversion to power structures that marginalize Muslims in the so-called "west". This allows a deeper understanding of the intertwined hegemonic discourses, and sheds light on the contradictions and ambivalences in the power structures of discourses. Finally, this offers a critical approach to social change regarding religion in the digital age.

## **More than thoughts and prayers: Critically engaging the study of religion in technoculture**

LaRisa Anderson, Doctoral Student, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Email: [landerson@unc.edu](mailto:landerson@unc.edu)

### **Abstract**

Following critical research on religion scholars (Goldstein 2020), I critique the trajectory of internet studies and offer a methodological intervention. The study of "digital religions" has been categorized into four waves of research over the past thirty years (Campbell 2017). Siuda (2021) adds to the literature by problematizing traditional and "innovative" religious distinctions. I extend Siuda's contributions by showing how scholars who study the adoption of digital technology at the individual, community, and institutional levels have not accounted for a clear definition of *religion*. I argue that both Siuda's contributions and a critical research on religion (CRR) framework can be applied to critical internet studies using Brock's (2018) Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) to reimagine the study of internet cultures. Rather than concretely define what does or does not constitute religion and risk the precarious legitimization process, I specifically apply religious investigation to technoculture through linguistic communication.

## **Gender (1): Religions and Androcentrism (PFC 02/018)**

Session Chair: Elora Halim Chowdhury (University of Massachusetts Boston, MA)

### **Regulating Abortion Talk: Examining Catholic-derived Anti-abortion Activism and Parish Responses**

Sarah-Jane Page, Pam Lowe (Aston University, UK)  
Email: [s.page1@aston.ac.uk](mailto:s.page1@aston.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

Taking a feminist approach, this paper examines how abortion discussions are regulated within Roman Catholic communities. In Britain, the evidence suggests the majority of Catholics accept abortion unequivocally or conditionally (Clements 2014). Yet most publicly-engaged British-based anti-abortion activists are Catholic, and prayer vigil activism at abortion sites embody Catholic religiosity, evidenced through the prevalence of material objects like rosary beads and the kinds of prayer practices deployed. This leads to challenges regarding not only how abortion is managed in church discussions, but also disputes over how key signifiers of Catholic identity are deployed at activism sites. The abortion debate is embedded in wider understandings about gender roles and normative (hetero)sexuality, and the extent to which anti-abortion activism is deemed harmful to those seeking abortion services. This paper draws on two projects: an ethnography of over 30 sites across the UK, and a second project qualitatively investigating the narratives of Catholic priests and parishioners.

### **Male and Female He created them"? The construction of Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Roman-Catholic Anti-Gender Discourse**

Nicole Maria Bauer (University of Innsbruck)

Email: [nicole.bauer@uibk.ac.at](mailto:nicole.bauer@uibk.ac.at)

### **Abstract**

The idea that most of today's 'major' religions are androcentric is not new. Friedrich Heiler highlighted this in the 1950s and introduced the term "men's religions" to refer to male dominance and tendencies to oppress women. Religions such as Christianity arose in the context of patriarchal social structures; religious ideas and practices reflect these structures and traditional gender roles. Processes of marginalization of women also take place in the major Christian denominations today. One of the influential conservative religious institutions targeting feminism and sexual rights is the Vatican itself. In 2019, the Congregation for Catholic Education published a document entitled "Male and Female He Created Them", which provoked both internal and public controversy. In this document, Catholic representatives express their criticism of gender theories, which they devalue as "ideology". My content analysis of the document focusses on the strategies to delegitimize and marginalize women and illuminate these strategies with post-structuralist approaches.

### **Negative Theology and the Void in Gender**

Emma McCabe (University of Stirling)  
Email: [emma.mccabe@stir.ac.uk](mailto:emma.mccabe@stir.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

This paper will explore the notion of absence in relation to women by analysing 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>-century theories of sexual difference. In doing so, it will endeavour to understand how a developing gynaecological discourse gave shape to gendered understandings of interiority and emptiness, which were seen as inherently female. This rhetoric of gendered absence will be shown to share similar tropes with negative theology which grapples with expressing an unknowable God. Unlike many branches of traditional Christianity, negative theology, in denying humans' capacity to fully know God, advocates the use of negation when expressing the divine (i.e., God is not...). By reimagining gender through a conceptual framework of negative theology, I argue the female body can be realised as embodied absence. Here, the female body becomes analogous to the God of mysticism as unknowable, gaining the power to identify, and to be identified, outside the bipartisan restrictions of male and female.

## **Lunch break**

Sunday 12 June, 14h-16h00

### **Religion, Politics, Freedom of religion, Violence (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Paul-Francois Tremlett (Open University)  
Email: [paul-francois.tremlett@open.ac.uk](mailto:paul-francois.tremlett@open.ac.uk)

## **Quoted Speech in al-Shabaab's Gaidi Mtaani: An Exploration of Textual References to the Qur'ān and the Aḥādīth**

Troy E. Spier (Dallas International University; Universidad San Francisco de Quito) [\(video\)](#)  
Email: [tspier@usfq.edu.ec](mailto:tspier@usfq.edu.ec)

### **Abstract**

Despite having risen to the world's attention only in 2013 and 2015 after armed attacks on patrons and students at the Westgate Shopping Mall and Garissa University College, respectively, Ḥarakat ash-Shabāb al-Mujāhidīn has been active in East Africa for almost two decades. Initially only using violence as their preferred method of ideological persuasion, al-Shabaab launched one of their many forms of multimodal propaganda in February 2012 entitled Gaidi Mtaani (2012-2017). The present study builds upon the limited scholarship on this bilingual periodical through an application of Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Stylistics to explore how English- and Swahili-language textual references to the Qur'ān and the aḥādīth foreground al-Shabaab's particular strand of Islamist ideology, indirectly comparing these findings to prior studies on similar publications released by Da'esh and al-Qa'idah.

## **Divine Mandate or A Quest to Satisfy the Leader's Thirst for Violence? A Social Movement Analysis of the Role of Religion in the Use of Violence by the Nigerian-based Independent People of Biafra**

Olewune Nnamdi Chibuike (Imo State University, Nigeria)  
Dr Amaechi Kingsley Ekene (University of Venda, South Africa)  
Email: [kingsleyokafor06@gmail.com](mailto:kingsleyokafor06@gmail.com)  
Prof Thobejane Tsolade (University of Venda, South Africa)

### **Abstract**

Since 2020, the Nigerian state has seen a renewed call and actual use of physical violence by the Eastern Nigerian-based Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). To sell the use of this unorthodox strategy, IPOB's leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu had drawn from multiple sources, including a mixture of Judaism and African traditional religion, prevalent within the region. Within such a context, he seems to frame the organisation's secessionist activism as a "divine war" that demands actual physical violence. This paper interrogates the importance of such framing for motivating physical violent activism. Focusing on sermons and lectures of the group's leaders (broadcasted on the organisation's official Online Radio, Radio Biafra) and on semi-structured interviews of selected IPOB members, it examines how such religious framing can impact the use and development of physical violence in the Eastern Nigerian-based social movement in 2020.

## **U.S. Terrorism Prosecution**

Sharmin Sadequee (University of Alberta. Augustana)  
Email: [sadequee@ualberta.ca](mailto:sadequee@ualberta.ca)

### **Abstract**

Although state officials claim that Islam is not specifically targeted in federal terrorism prosecutions, religion prominently features in the case litigations and Islam is frequently used as evidence against the accused in the United States Article IV courts. The notion of legitimate

vs. unacceptable religion is frequently parsed at length, as legal experts seek to define what evidence is protected as “religious” vs. what evidence is considered as “violence.” Through a close ethnographic and critical reading of trial transcripts, I show how these prosecutions reproduce a monolithic idea of Islam in and through liberal legal paradigms and practices. I argue that the use of Islam against the accused in terrorism trials is not only a way of regulating the faith tradition but also the way courts function to intensify political tensions. These prosecutions give rise to contradictions that facilitates the US state to maintain its hierarchy over racial and religious minorities.

## **Gender (2): Women experiences and narratives (PFC 02/017)**

### **Exploring Religious and Sexual Identities Among Young Muslims: A Sociological Study**

Sana Khan (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) ([video](#))

Email: [syndic.khan@gmail.com](mailto:syndic.khan@gmail.com)

#### **Abstract**

This paper explores the relationship between religious and sexual identities among young Muslims. Through their voices I seek to understand what it means and how it feels, to negotiate and navigate the exhilarations and exhaustions of converging and conflicting identities within overarching dominant social codes. This paper looks into the significant factors that inform the construction of these identities and the strategies they develop to manage the intersection of these identities in living them out in everyday life. Taking religion as its point of departure, this paper maps the lived experience of a few young Muslims in relation to their sexuality. Sexuality is not only about personal choices, emotions, troubles and decisions but also about culture and politics, where the personal and the social intertwine or at times collide. A few religious voices have dominated the debate, reinforcing the sex negative view of religion. It appears then that religious young adults are occupying a rather contradictory space. This paper then looks at the multiple meanings these religious young adults construct of religion and sexuality.

### **Second-sentence to second-chance: An exploration into models of justice and rehabilitation for Muslim women in prison**

Faatimah Jeelani (University of Leeds)

Email: [faatimahsj@gmail.com](mailto:faatimahsj@gmail.com)

#### **Abstract**

The unique involvement of Muslim women with the criminal justice system is unequivocally neglected by academia. This research paper acknowledges the gap in literature as it investigates the significance of restorative justice in addressing the ‘second-sentence’ many Muslim women face when leaving prison. The sentence conveys the stigma and marginalisation experienced by many Muslim women offenders from political, cultural and faith communities. An understanding of Islamic principles relating to rehabilitation supports the argument of restorative justice as a replacement to the ‘second-sentence’. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants with direct contact with Muslim women involved with the criminal justice system. The analysis of the data demonstrates that restorative justice echoes ideas of rehabilitation for offenders presented in Islamic

jurisprudence. This framework of support, when endorsed by practitioners, can deliver unique care addressing both practical and emotional needs of Muslim women involved in the criminal justice system.

## **Critical Research on Gender and Religion across Sources and Centuries: The Construction of Female Exorcists in Syriac Hagiography and New Media**

Nicole Maria Bauer (University of Innsbruck)

Email: [nicole.bauer@uibk.ac.at](mailto:nicole.bauer@uibk.ac.at)

J. Andrew Doole (University of Innsbruck)

Email: [andrew.doole@uibk.ac.at](mailto:andrew.doole@uibk.ac.at)

### **Abstract**

The ways in which women are portrayed in religious contexts varies across periods and cultures. Gender Studies illuminates ways in which sexuality is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in religious discourses. In the analysis of such discourses we ask the same question and employ the same method to very different sources: late antique Syriac hagiographical texts in which saints Mary and Eugenia are found casting out demons, and the media appearances of the (female) “teenage exorcists” Tess and Savannah Scherkenback and Brynne Larson. While the presentation of female exorcists subverts certain gender hierarchies, at the same time these women are instrumentalized and idealized as powerful agents of a heteronormative worldview in which women are holy and chaste, whether in ancient manuscripts or online videos. With a discourse-analytical approach we illuminate the construction of femininity in disparate source materials and contribute to the social-scientific study of gender in religion.

## **Women Mystics: From Introspection to Political Prominence: Teresa de Ávila, Hindiyyah cUjaymi and Candida Xu**

Borja W. González Fernández (Necmettin Erbakan University, Konya)

Email: [borjawgf@gmail.com](mailto:borjawgf@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Usually portrayed under the light of sexual deviation or mental sickness by academia, women mystics had represented, nonetheless, a well-defined category in the late medieval and early modern world. Armed with a socially acceptable religious justification, these women defied the patriarchal structures of Church and State in order to fulfil the desires and aspirations of their individual self. In so doing, they not only gave free expression to their subjective preferences, but also constructed alternative spaces of female socialization, while furthering the path toward individualism and introspection that characterizes modernity. Focusing on the experiences of three mystics living in vastly differing social contexts, this paper will try, on the one hand, to identify the basic characteristics of the so-called mystical model while, on the other, to study the influence of female mystics in transforming their respective societies through the sheer force of their individual determination.

## **Religion and its Relationship to Northern Irish Women’s Sexual Scripts**

Ruth Flanagan (Sociology, Queen University Belfast)  
Email: [rflanagan07@qub.ac.uk](mailto:rflanagan07@qub.ac.uk)

**Abstract:**

This paper will discuss the findings from my PhD research that explored the relationship between religious upbringing and women's sexual experiences. It will focus on one dominant theme titled 'sexual narratives' that emerged from 18 semi structured interviews conducted in 2020. All the socializing institutions in Northern Ireland play a role in the development of the dominant cultural scripts relating to gender, sex, and sexuality. The cultural scripts have been created through a religious lens due in part to the historical dominance of Christianity and its relationship to political and policy development. Women in Northern Ireland have been socialized with the dominant Christian ideals that promote and often legitimize gender complementarian essentialist roles and a specific sexual morality which promotes heteronormative and androcentric sexual practices. The theme 'sexual narratives' describes how these gendered and sexual norms were incorporated into my participants intrapsychic sexual development and interpersonal sexual experiences throughout their life courses.

**Coffee break**

Sunday 12 June, 16h30-18h00

**Religion and Social Justice (panel) (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

Session Chair: Faatimah Jeelani (University of Leeds)  
Email: [faatimahsj@gmail.com](mailto:faatimahsj@gmail.com)

**Panel Abstract**

In Religious Studies there are at least three frames for addressing social injustice. One riffs off the idea of literacy: in a society where cliches and stereotypes about religious others are deeply entrenched – think of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism but also associations of religion more generally with ignorance, irrationality, abuse and despotic power – Religious Studies has an important role to play in cultivating critical thinking and critical religious literacy to counter intolerance, prejudice and disinformation about religious and secular lives and identities. A second frame explores the different roles of religions in social movements, a tradition of scholarship that has spawned numerous studies of anti-colonial movements across the global south by historians and anthropologists. More contemporaneously, the role of religious groups and religious values among activists campaigning on issues from race to democracy to climate change offer productive avenues for research. A third frame is more theoretical and works to problematise the conceptual landscape of secular modernity. Concepts such as ritual, fetishism and even affect destabilise taken-for-granted assumptions about assemblies, things and rationality, respectively. They contribute to generating a picture of the social that is not founded on secular-rational human actors maximising their access to various sources of capital, but rather envisions social worlds charged by deep moral and emotional currents and vivified by assemblages or publics of humans and non-humans with their own demands for justice.

**Transforming the American Sangha: Race, Racism and Diversity in North American Insight Meditation**

Nalika Gajaweera (University of Southern California)

### **Abstract**

North American Insight Meditation institutions, rooted in the Vipassana tradition of Theravada Buddhism, are often seen as liberal, inclusive multicultural spaces committed to welcoming diverse constituencies into their communities. This presentation will nuance this image by using a social scientific lens to understand the struggles, experiences and practices of self-identified North American people of color (PoC) who are teachers, practitioners and advocates who have sought to incorporate race and diversity concerns in major American Insight institutions over the last three decades. The paper will discuss the efforts over the past couple of decades of PoC Insight meditation practitioners to confront racism and whiteness within North American Insight, and facilitate institutional change around diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. The paper draws upon interdisciplinary sources such as queer and feminist literature, organizational management, and Buddhist studies, to understand complex issues around race, religious institutions and social justice.

### **Manifesting Social Justice with Chinese Religion and Hardcore Punk: The Sonic Exorcism of Hong Kong's Rokkasen**

H. S. ("Shum") Sum Cheuk Shing (University of Chicago)

### **Abstract**

While protest art—particularly visual-based media—of Hong Kong has garnered significant attention in recent years, the role of religion in the territory's social movements remains an under-explored area of study. By considering the case of a local underground musical group, namely Rokkasen, this paper examines the intersection of Chinese religion, independent music, and social justice in the recent Anti-ELAB movement (Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, also known as the 2019 Hong Kong protests). At first glance, the release of Rokkasen's debut album *Staring at the Moon with Feelings* in October 2019 might appear to be a mere passing footnote during a fertile period of cultural production in Hong Kong. Closer analysis, however, reveals a potent encapsulation of on-the-ground attitudes concerning the surrounding social and political upheaval. Analyzing album art, social media posts, and song lyrics, I explore how Rokkasen incorporates Chinese religious elements—especially "Daoist" or quest-for-transcendence motifs—to deliver liminal yet simultaneously widespread expressions of anti-establishment rage.

### **Performing Social Justice in Sacralising Modernity: An Assessment of Jeffrey Alexander's Cultural Sociology for the Critical Study of Religion and Social Movements**

Matthew Stemp (Goldsmiths)

### **Abstract**

Contemporary social movement theory emphasises the role of narrative, symbolism, performance and emotions in how demands for social justice are collectively communicated and enacted. While this cultural emphasis successfully overcomes the problems of earlier approaches that assumed the existence of individual rational actors, a neglected dimension of these theoretical developments is the question of secularity and religion. In this paper, I assess Jeffrey Alexander's work over the last twenty years as the leading proponent of the cultural sociology of social movements, and one who thoroughly interrogates so-called 'secular' modernity. Beginning with his recent exchange with Charles Taylor, I trace his emphasis on sacrality back to his analysis of the civil rights movement in *The Civil Sphere*. I conclude by identifying limitations in his 'late Durkheimianism' from the perspective of the



critical study of religion, questioning Alexander's distinction between 'religion' and 'Religion' that grounds his emphasis on subjectivity and meaning.

### **Transnational digital activism and the making of moral publics**

Paul-François Tremlett (The Open University)

#### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on two organisations which campaign on human rights in the Philippines; the Campaign for Human Rights in the Philippines (CHRP) which is based in London, and IBON International which has offices in Manila and Brussels. Focusing on (i) their use of information communication technologies (ICTs), (ii) documentation of some of their offline and online campaigns and (iii), exploration of the attitudes of activists towards digital activism, I explore the materialization of transnational political publics through affect, and I mobilise Emile Durkheim's idea of totemism to theorise affective publics as "moral publics".

### **Gender (3) Gender, Religion, and Intimate Life in Transnational Contexts (PFC 02/017)**

#### **Panel Chairperson & Discussant:**

Tina Beyene (California State University, Northridge)

Email: [tina.beyene@csun.edu](mailto:tina.beyene@csun.edu)

#### **Panel Abstract**

This panel is grounded in critical approaches to the study of gender and religion. This panel brings together scholars working on Southeast Asia, South Asia, and West Asia to explore transnational feminist scholarship on gender, religion, intimacy, love, representation, and everyday life. Transnational feminist research methodologies create opportunities to ask fresh questions, seek new directions, and craft innovative theories to expand interdisciplinary inquiry on the increasingly complex nexus of gender/sexuality, religion, and informal and formal institutions—including the family and the state.

We consider the following questions: How do these differently situated geographical, historical, and religio-political contexts produce gendered and sexual experiences and subjectivities? How do our interlocutors participate in and shape intimate and public life, particularly among a set of constraints around their gendered and sexual lives? How do we read the shifts in gendered and sexual politics through different historical eras when women are relegated to the margins of the archives? How do our research questions and the connections between our projects enable us to reimagine transnational feminist liberatory goals while remaining critical of religio-patriarchal nationalisms, as well as historical and global tensions that inform our research and the lives of those we are thinking with?

### **Gender, Communal Belonging, and Muslim Politics in Urban Malaysia**

Azza Basarudin (California State University, Long Beach)

Email: [azza.basarudin@csulb.edu](mailto:azza.basarudin@csulb.edu)

#### **Abstract**

The politics of modesty remains a highly contested issue both within and beyond communities of Muslims. Headscarf practices are as diverse as they are multivalent—with ties to national

and local contexts and shaped by the transnational circulation of Islam. A nuanced approach to these variously situated practices across narratives of choice, religiosity, and consumerism requires an unequivocal reappraisal of patriarchal nationalism beyond the Euro-American experience of Islamophobia. Based on intimate patchwork ethnography with Malay Muslim women in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, this paper offers a feminist reading on the interconnections of gendered piety, communal belonging, and Islamization debates. This paper draws on intergenerational narrations of subjectivity to reveal the regulation of headscarf practices through the cultural construction of Muslim difference. Specifically, this paper suggests that feminist analyses capable of translating without diminishing narratives born out of localized negotiations of self, family, and community and attentive to the deep imbrication of patriarchal nationalism, anti-imperialist, and transnational configurations are indispensable to re/imagining feminist futurities in the study of gender in Muslim cultures.

### **Under Construction: The New Woman in Bangladeshi Cinema**

Elora Halim Chowdhury (University of Massachusetts Boston, MA) ([video](#))  
Email: [Elora.Chowdhury@umb.edu](mailto:Elora.Chowdhury@umb.edu)

#### **Abstract**

Bangladesh, a seemingly homogenous nation, comprises of a majority Muslim and Bengali population denoting a fused and dominant ethno-linguistic and religious identity. These categories, pitted against each other as secular-progressive and religious-extremist however have been the site of competing national-identity formation. Cinematic representations - particularly by and about women - exceed, subvert and reconfigure these binary and oppositional categories in imagining the nation. Further, in recent decades, amid neoliberal economic growth, Bangladesh has witnessed continuing polarization of society fuelled by ideologies that seek to exclude "the other," variously defined through the lens of religion, ethnicity, language, gender, and sexuality. This paper aims to explore the region's contested legacy of women's inclusion and emancipation expressed through its performative traditions, exemplified by contemporary women's cinematic narratives. Specifically, the paper looks at the work of feminist filmmaker Rubaiyat Hossain and the competing and composite representations of the 'new woman' within transnational development politics.

### **Self and Desire in South Asian Sufi Poetry**

Khanum Shaikh (California State University, Northridge)  
Email: [khanum.shaikh@csun.edu](mailto:khanum.shaikh@csun.edu)

#### **Abstract**

Feminists have interrogated the concept of love and its naturalized link to the romantic heterosexual couple. How, they have asked, do normalizing social structures constrain desire to produce certain teleological outcomes (e.g., marriage), and how do we think about selfhood and subjectivity vis-à-vis discourse of love? This paper explores concepts of love and desire in South Asian Sufi Muslim poetry and popular music. What conceptual vocabularies does this genre offer in thinking about the boundaries of self/other, the fluidity of gender, and the annihilation of the self that both desires and constrains? What theoretical and liberatory possibilities are enabled within these conceptions of desire that are not in the service of social reproduction? This paper opens up a space to consider the lived experiences of Islam and its

articulations with culture. It also allows us to track expressions of “love” in different contexts to mine its radical possibilities.

## **Religion, Science, and Modernity (PFC 02/018)**

Session Chair: Alex Fry (Durham University, United Kingdom)  
Email: [alex.d.fry@durham.ac.uk](mailto:alex.d.fry@durham.ac.uk)

### ***Eppur si muove.* Religious practices and Latin American modernity**

Gustavo Morello SJ (Boston College, USA)  
Email: [morellog@bc.edu](mailto:morellog@bc.edu)

#### **Abstract**

The presentation explores the interaction of religion and modernity. The thesis proposed here is simple: There is an interaction between modernity and religion in Latin America, but the result has not been religion diminishment, but its transformation. The difficulty in assessing religiosity as it exists in Latin America is due in part to the continuing use of categories that were not designed for religious cultures outside the North Atlantic world. Those categories point us toward a different kind of dynamics, which in fact obscure Latin American religious dynamics. If we look at religion from Latin America and from the people who practice it, we will find a different definition and different conceptual tools for understanding the religious experience of Latin American people, and perhaps it helps us to look at religion in a different way.

### **Religion and Science in the Modern World**

Zachary T. Swanson and Ralph W. Hood (The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)  
Email: [rbs972@mocs.utc.edu](mailto:rbs972@mocs.utc.edu)

#### **Abstract**

Religion for many is a worldview that offers answers to the most profound questions in life such as the origin of the universe, the meaning of human life, and human destiny. As time has progressed, however, many traditions have contended with the dominating scientific worldview that has evolved since the Enlightenment. Proponents of psychological science subscribe to the methodological exclusion of the transcendent using essentially epistemological criteria to exclude ontological claims. In this paper, we will examine the many answers that people have to offer about the role of religion and how it relates to their philosophical worldviews regarding meaning, morality, and truth claims. We explore the issue of worldviews but noting that the contrast is not between science and religion but rather religion and naturalism.

### **The Science and Religion Debate, and Inference to the Best Explanation**

Dr. Andrew Ross Atkinson, Social Cognition Unit, University of Bialystok, Poland & University of Agder, Norway.

Email: [a.atkinson@uwb.edu.pl](mailto:a.atkinson@uwb.edu.pl) / [logistikon@protonmail.com](mailto:logistikon@protonmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This paper reengages with the science and religion debate in the light of the last three decades of scholarly progress in the study of religion coming from the cognitive and evolutionary sciences of religion (Lawson & McCauley, 1990; Boyer, 2001; Bering, 2002; Barrett, 2004; Wilson, 2002, 2019; Norenzayan, 2013). I ask, if it is indeed possible to account for the origins of religious belief, its cultural transmission and evolution, and its maintenance – without any appeal to the real existence of any supernatural deity – then are we in a position to say we have explained it all away? If we are, how does this affect stalwart themes in the philosophy of religion about God's existence?

**Closing Discussion, 18h00 (Canada Room & Council Chamber)**

**Dinner in the Great Hall, 19h00**

Monday 13 June, 10h00 (Belfast Political Tour)

The meeting point will be in front of Queen's University Belfast.